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The President's Daily Brief

February 2, 1976

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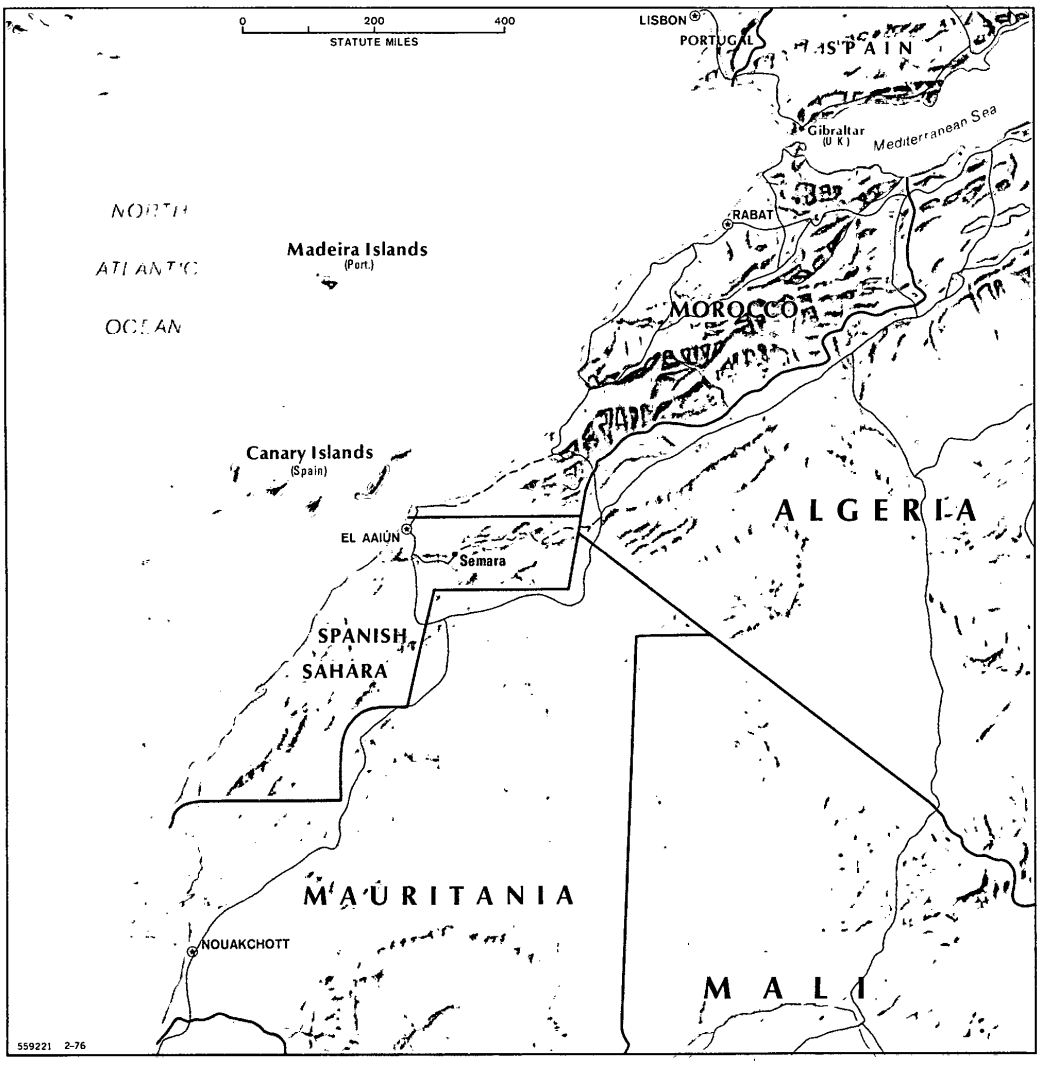

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MOROCCO - ALGERIA - SPANISH SAHARA

We do not believe the Algerian News Service claim on Saturday that Polisario forces began laying siege to several Moroccan and Mauritanian positions in Spanish Sahara and were assaulting the Moroccan-held town of Semara.

The Moroccans have yet to confirm any fresh attacks, and we do not believe the Polisario is capable of carrying out more than harassing attacks around Semara, which is strongly garrisoned. Our defense attaché in Rabat reports no new activity, but he believes the Moroccans are continuing sweep operations in eastern Sahara.

A high Algerian official told Ambassador Parker on Saturday that Algiers is skeptical that the current Arab mediation effort will lead to Moroccan concessions. The Algerians believe the main thrust of their diplomacy must be made at the UN. The Algerian official said that Algiers wants a political solution, and that if it wanted war it would have reinforced the Algerian unit that was attacked in the Sahara earlier this week.

Meanwhile, the Algerian press says the special emissaries from Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Tunisia have suggested a special meeting of Arab foreign ministers to deal with the dispute.

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USSR-AFRICA

The Soviet military airlift to Africa continued over the weekend with the arrival in Conakry of two more AN-22 heavy transports, apparently en route to Angola.

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NOTES

Key Christian and Muslim leaders in Lebanon *met separately over the weekend to review the major ingredients of the Syrian-proposed political settlement. Final decisions will await President Franjiyah's meeting this week with Syrian President Asad.*

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In a gesture apparently aimed at impressing the US Congress, Turkey *announced on Saturday that it is going to begin withdrawing 2,000 troops this week from* Cyprus.

The Turks claim to have already withdrawn 10,000 troops from the island since the 1974 invasion, bringing the current strength level to 30,000 men. This figure agrees with our current estimate of Turkish forces, but we do not believe there has been a force reduction of 10,000 troops. The Turks apparently withdrew some 1,500 to 2,500 troops in late 1974, possibly another 1,000 in early February 1975, and some 750 last September. In addition, there have been no indications that the reductions have included tanks or major pieces of artillery.

* * *

Indian *Prime Minister Gandhi's imposition of central rule on the southern state of Tamil Nadu--one of the two states not ruled by her Congress Party--probably was intended to underscore her determination to brook no opposition to government policies.*

The leaders of the state government had opposed the Prime Minister's state of emergency decree and had only loosely enforced its provisions. According to our consul in Madras--the state capital--there are no signs of disturbance in the city, but the police have been reinforced.

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